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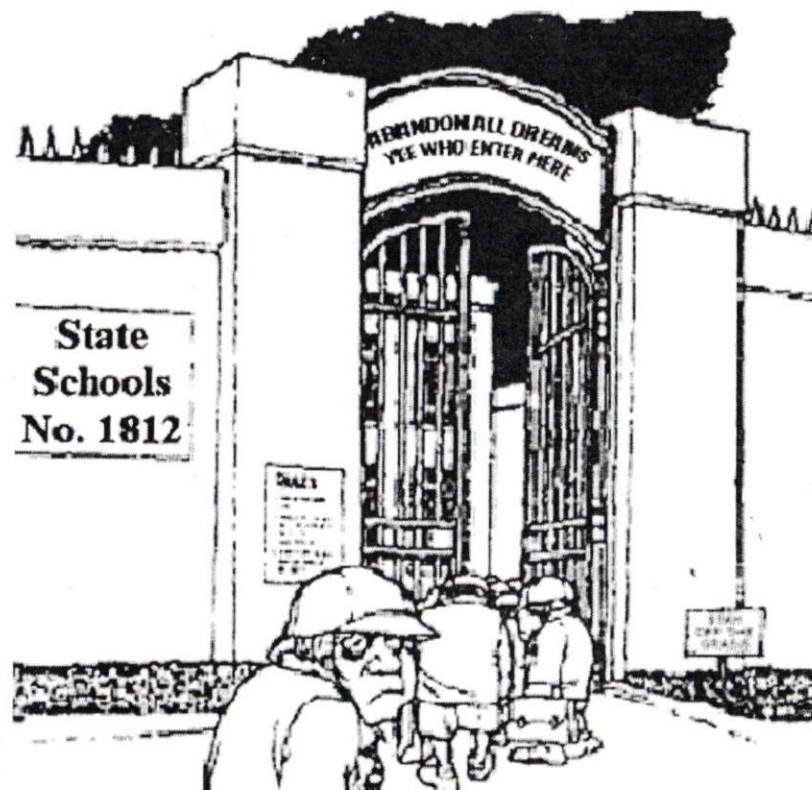
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Schools No Longer



Colin Ward

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From William Godwin's An Account of the Seminary That Will Be Opened on Monday the Fourth Day of August at Epsom in Surrey (1783) to Paul Goodman's Compulsory Mis-education (1964), anarchism has persistently regarded itself as having distinctive and revolutionary implications for education. Indeed, no other movement whatever has assigned to educational principles, concepts, experiments, and practices a more significant place in its writings and activities.

KRIMERMAN and PERRY,
Patterns of Anarchy (1966)

Ultimately the social function of education is to perpetuate society: it is the socialising function. Society guarantees its future by rearing its children in its own image. In traditional societies the peasant rears his sons to cultivate the soil, the man of power rears his to wield power, and the priest instructs them all in the necessity of a priesthood. In modern governmental society, as Frank MacKinnon puts it, 'The educational system is the largest instrument in the modern state for telling people what to do. It enrols five-year-olds and tries to direct their mental, and much of their social, physical and moral development for twelve or more of the most formative years of their lives.'

To find a historical parallel to this you would have to go back to ancient Sparta, the principle difference being that the only education we hear of in the ancient world is that of ruling classes. Spartan education was simply training for infantry warfare and for instructing the citizens in the techniques for subduing the slave class, the helot who did the daily work of the state and greatly outnumbered the citizens. In the modern world the helots have to be educated too, and the equivalent of Spartan warfare is the industrial and technical competition between nations, which is sometimes the product of war, and sometimes its prelude. The year in which Britain's initial advantage in the world's industrial markets began to wane was the year in which, after generations of bickering about its religious content, universal compulsory elementary education was introduced, and every significant development since the Act of 1870 had a close relationship to the experience, not merely of commercial rivalry but of war itself. The English Education Acts of 1902, 1918 and 1944 were all born of war, and every new international conflict, whether in rivalry for markets or in military techniques, has been the signal for a new burst of concern among the rival powers over the scale and scope of their systems of education.

The notion that primary education should be free, compulsory and universal is very much older than the British legislation of the nineteenth century. Martin Luther appealed 'To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany that they establish and main-

Notes

1. Frank MacKinnon, The Politics of Education (London, 1961).
2. Lewis Mumford, The Condition of Man (London, 1944).
3. William Godwin, An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (London, 1793; modern reprint Toronto 1946).
4. Michael Bakunin, God and the State (New York 1916, 1970).
5. *ibid.*
6. William Godwin, The Enquirer (London, 1797).
7. 'A School the Children Won't Leave', Picture Post, 4 November 1944. The Story of Prestolee School is told in Gerard Holmes, The Idiot Teacher (London, 1952).
8. The Teacher, 8 April 1972.
9. Paul Goodman, Compulsory Miseducation (New York, 1964; London, 1971).
10. Gerald Brenan, The Literature of the Spanish People (Cambridge, 1951).

tain Christian schools,' compulsory education was founded in Calvinist Geneva in 1536, and Calvin's Scottish disciple, John Knox 'planted a school as well as a kirk in every parish'. In Puritan Massachusetts free compulsory education was introduced in 1647. The common school, Lewis Mumford notes, 'contrary to popular belief, is no belated product of nineteenth-century democracy: it played a necessary part in the absolutist-mechanical formula ... centralised authority was now belatedly taking up the work that had been neglected with the wiping out of municipal freedom in the greater part of Europe.'¹² In other words, having destroyed local initiative, the state was acting in its own interest. Compulsory education is bound up historically, not only with the printing press, the rise of protestantism and capitalism, but with the growth of the idea of the nation state itself.

All the great rationalist philosophers of the eighteenth century pondered on the problems of popular education, and the two acutest educational thinkers among them ranged themselves on opposite sides on the question of the *organisation* of education: Rousseau for the state, William Godwin against it. Rousseau, whose *Emile* postulates a completely individual education (human society is ignored, the tutor's entire life is devoted to poor Emile) did, nevertheless, in his *Discourse on Political Economy* (1758) argue for public education 'under regulations prescribed by the government ... if children are brought up in common in the bosom of equality; if they are imbued with the laws of the State and the precepts of the General Will ... we cannot doubt that they will cherish one another mutually as brothers ... to become in time defenders and fathers of the country of which they will have been for so long the children.'

Godwin, in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) criticises the whole idea of a *national* education. He summarises the arguments in favour, which are those used by Rousseau, adding to them the question, 'If the education of our youth be entirely confined to the prudence of their parents, or the accidental benevolence of private individuals, will it not be a necessary consequence that some will be educated to virtue, others to vice, and others again entirely neglected?' Godwin's answer is worth quoting at length because his lone voice from the end of the eighteenth century speaks to us in the accents of the de-schoolers of our own day:

The injuries that result from a system of national education are, in the first place, that all public establishments include in them the idea of permanence ... public education has always expended its energies in the support of prejudice; it teaches its pupils not the fortitude that shall bring every proposition to the test of examination, but the art of vindicating such tenets as may chance to be previously established ... Even in the petty institution of Sunday schools, the chief lessons that are taught are a superstitious veneration for the Church of England, and to bow to every man in a handsome coat...

Secondly, the idea of national education is founded in an inattention to the nature of mind. Whatever each man does for himself is done well; whatever his neighbours or his country undertake to do for him is done ill ... He that learns because he desires to learn will listen to the instructions he receives and apprehend their

Eduardo Martinez Torner organised. Never, I think, since the early Middle Ages has an educational establishment produced such astonishing results on the life of a nation, for it was largely by means of the *Institución* and the *Residencia* that Spanish culture was raised suddenly to a level it had not known for three hundred years.¹⁰

Lorm, Dali and Buñuel were fellow students at the *Residencia*; a true community of scholars with a genuine function in the community it served. The only parallels I can think of are the one-time Black Mountain College in the US, and the annual two-day History Workshop at Ruskin College, Oxford (significantly not a part of the university), where at a cost of 50p each a thousand students and teachers gather to present and discuss original research in an atmosphere like that of a pop festival. It is a festival of scholarship, far away from the world of vice-chancellors and academic boards, running a finishing school for the bored aspirants for privileged jobs in the meritocracy.

In the world-wide student revolt of the late 1960s, from one university after another came the comment that the period of revolutionary self-government was the one genuinely educational experience that the students had encountered. 'He had learned more in those six weeks than in four years of classes,' (Dwight Macdonald on a Columbia student); 'Everyone is a richer person for the experience and has enriched the community by it,' (LSE student); 'The last ten days have been the most rewarding of my whole university career,' (Peter Townsend of Essex University); 'This generation of Hull students has had the opportunity to take part in events which may well be the most valuable part of their university lives; (David Rubinstein on Hull). At Hornsey College of Art one lecturer said, 'It's the greatest educational thing I've ever known,' and another called it 'a surge of creativity unheard of in the annals of higher education'.

What a delicious, but predictable irony, that *real* education, self-education, should only come from locking out or ignoring the expensive academic hierarchy. The students' revolt was a microcosm of anarchy, spontaneous, self-directed activity replacing the power structure by a network of autonomous groups and individuals. What the students experienced was that sense of liberation that comes from taking your own decisions and assuming your own responsibilities. It is an experience that we need to carry far beyond the privileged world of higher education, into the factory, the neighbourhood, the daily lives of people everywhere.

ends in the Plaza Mayor. The Penny Teacher was sent to prison as an anarchist and died there. The Saint with the Beard was warned off from his corner and disappeared. But he turned up again eventually and went on secretly lending tattered books to his pupils, for the love of reading.

The most devastating criticism we can make of the organised system is that its effects are profoundly anti-educational. In Britain, at five years old, most children cannot wait to get into school. At fifteen, most cannot wait to get out. On the day I am writing, our biggest-selling newspaper devotes its front page to a photograph of a thirteen-year-old truant, with his comment, 'The worse part is I thought I only had another two years to sweat out, then they put the leaving age up to sixteen. That's when I thought, sod it.' The likeliest lever for change in the organised system will come, not from criticism or example from outside, but from pressure from below. There has always been a proportion of pupils who attend unwillingly, who resent the authority of the school and its arbitrary regulations, and who put a low value on the processes of education because their own experience tells them that it is an obstacle race in which they are so often the losers that they would be mugs to enter the competition. This is what school has taught them, and when this army of also-rans, no longer cowed by threats, no longer amenable to cajolery, no longer to be bludgeoned by physical violence into sullen acquiescence, grows large enough to prevent the school from functioning with even the semblance of relevance or effectiveness, the educational revolution will begin.

At the opposite end of the educational spectrum, the university, the powers of renewal through secession has ancient historical precedents. Oxford was started by seceding English students from Paris, Cambridge by scholars who fled from Oxford, London by dissenters who could not accept the religious qualifications required by Oxford and Cambridge. But the most perfect anarchist model for a university comes from Spain. Towards the end of the last century, the Spanish government, dominated then as now, by the Church, dismissed some leading university professors. A few of them started a 'free school for higher studies, the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* and around this arose the so-called 'Generation of '98' the small group of intellectuals who, paralleling the growth of the working class movements of that time, sought to diagnose the stifling inertia, hypocrisy and corruption of Spanish life - the art critic and teacher Manuel Cossio, the philosophers Unamuno and Ortega y Gasset, the economist Joaquin Costa (who summed up his programme for Spain in the phrase *school and larder*) the poet Antonio Machado and the novelist Pío Baroja. The *Institución* had an even more remarkable offspring, the *Residencia de Estudiantes*, or Residential College for Students, founded by Alberto Jiménez in 1910. Gerald Brenan gives us a fascinating glimpse of the *Residencia*:

Here, over a long course of years, Unamuno, Cossio and Ortega taught, walking about the garden or sitting in the shade of the trees in the manner of the ancient philosophers: here Juan Ramón Jiménez wrote and recited his poems, and here too a later generation of poets, among them García Lorca and Alberti, learned their trade, coming under the influence of the school of music and folksong which

meaning. He that teaches because he desires to teach will discharge his occupation with enthusiasm and energy. But the moment political institution undertakes to assign to every man his place; the functions of all will be discharged with supineness and indifference...

Thirdly, the project of a national education ought uniformly to be discouraged on account of its obvious alliance with national government ... Government will not fail to employ it to strengthen its hand and perpetuate its institutions ... Their view as instigator of a system of education will not fail to be analogous to their views in their political capacity...³

Contemporary critics of the alliance between national government and national education would agree, and would argue that it is in the *nature* of public authorities to run coercive and hierarchical institutions whose ultimate function is to perpetuate social inequality and to brainwash the young into the acceptance of their particular slot in the organised system. A hundred years ago, in a book called *God and the State*, Michael Bakunin characterised 'the people' as 'the eternal minor, the pupil confessedly forever incompetent to pass his examinations, rise to the knowledge of his teachers, and dispense with their discipline'.

One day I asked Mazzini what measures would be taken for the emancipation of the people, once his triumphant unitary republic had been definitely established. 'The first measure', he answered, 'will be the foundation of schools for the people.' 'And what will the people be taught in these schools?' 'The duties of man - sacrifice and devotion.'⁴

Bakunin made the same comparison as is made today by Everett Reimer and Ivan Mich between the teaching profession and a priestly caste, and he declared that 'Like conditions, like causes, always produce like effects. It will, then, be the same with the professors of the modern school, divinely inspired and licensed by the State. They will necessarily become, some without knowing it, others with full knowledge of the cause, teachers of the doctrine of popular sacrifice to the power of the State and to the profit of the privileged classes.' Must we then, he asked, eliminate from society all instruction and abolish all schools? Far from it, he replied, but he demanded schools from which the *principle of authority* will be eliminated: 'They will be schools no longer; they will be popular academies in which neither pupils nor masters will be known, where the people will come freely to get, if they need it, free instruction, and in which, rich in their own expertise, they will teach in their turn many things to the professors who shall bring them knowledge which they lack.'⁵

This entirely different conception of the school had already been envisaged by Godwin in 1797 as a plan 'calculated entirely to change the face of education. The whole formidable apparatus, which has hitherto attended it, is swept away. Strictly speaking, no such characters are left upon the scene as either preceptor or pupil. The boy, like the man, studies because he desires it. He proceeds upon a plan of his own invention, or which, by adopting, he has made his own.'⁶ Perhaps the near-

est thing to a school of this kind within the official system was Prestolee School (an elementary school in Lancashire revolutionised after the First World War by its headmaster Edward O'Neill), where 'time-tables and programmes play an insignificant part, for the older children come back when school hours are over, and with them, their parents and elder brothers and sisters'.⁷

In spite of the talk of 'community schools', there are a thousand bureaucratic reasons why O'Neill's version of Bakunin's 'popular academy' could not be put into practice today, and remains only a vision of the future transformation of the school. However, Professor Harry Ree told a conference of young teachers that: 'I think we are going to see in your lifetime the end of schools as we know them. Instead there will be a community centre with the doors open twelve hours a day, seven days a week, where anybody can wander in and out of the library, workshops, sports centre, self-service store and bar. In a hundred years' time the compulsory attendance laws for children to go to school may have gone the same way as the compulsory laws for attendance at church'.⁸

Today, as the educational budgets of both rich and poor nations get more and more gigantic, we would add a further criticism of the role of the state as educator throughout the world: the affront to the idea of social justice. An immense effort by well-intentioned reformers has gone into the attempt to manipulate the education system to provide equality of opportunity, but this has simply resulted in a theoretical and illusory equal start in a competition to become more and more unequal. The greater the sums of money that are poured into the education industries of the world, the smaller the benefit to the people at the bottom of the educational, occupational and social hierarchy. The universal education system turns out to be yet another way in which the poor subsidise the rich. Everett Reimer, for instance, remarking that schools are an almost perfectly regressive form of taxation, notes that the children of the poorest one-tenth of the population of the United States cost the public in schooling \$2,500 each over a lifetime, while the children of the richest one-tenth cost about \$35,000. 'Assuming that one-third of this is private expenditure, the richest one-tenth still gets ten times as much of public funds for education as the poorest one-tenth'. In his suppressed Unesco report of 1970 Michael Huberman reached the same conclusion for the majority of countries in the world. In Britain, ignoring completely the university aspect, we spend twice as much on the secondary school life of a grammar-school sixth former as on a secondary modern school-leaver, while, if we do include university expenditure, we spend as much on an undergraduate in one year as on a normal schoolchild throughout his life. 'While the highest social group benefit *seventeen* times as much as the lowest group from the expenditure on universities, they only contribute five times as much revenue'. We may thus conclude that one significant role of the state in the education systems of the world is to perpetuate social and economic injustice.

You can see why one contemporary anarchist educator, Paul Goodman, suggests that it would be simpler, cheaper and fairer to dismantle the system and give each kid his or her share of the education money. Goodman's programme is devastatingly simple. For the young child provide a 'protective and life-nourishing envi-

ronment, by decentralising the school into small units of twenty to fifty in available shop-fronts or clubhouses, with class attendances not compulsory. Link the school with economically marginal farms where city kids can go for a couple of months a year. For older children:

Probably an even better model would be the Athenian pedagogue touring the city with his charges, but for this the streets and working-places of the city must be made safer and more available than is likely. (The prerequisite of city-planning is for the children to be able to use the city, for no city is governable if it does not grow citizens who feel it is theirs.) The goal of elementary pedagogy is a very modest one: it is for a small child, under his own steam, to poke interestingly into whatever goes on and be able, by observation, questions and practical imitation, to get something out of it in his own terms. In our society this happens pretty well at home up to age four, but after that it becomes forbiddingly difficult.⁹

Technical education, he believes, is best undertaken on the job for, provided that the young have options and can organise and criticise, on the job education is the quickest way to workers' management. University education 'is for adults who already know something'.

Goodman peddled his ideas of incidental education in and out of season for most of his writing life, but only very recently have people begun to take them seriously. What has changed the climate has been the experience of the students' revolt, and the educational crisis of the American cities - with more and more expenditure providing less and less effective education, and the impact of educational thinkers from the Third World like Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire who have shown how totally inappropriate to real social needs the standard pattern of school and university are. Everywhere experiments are being made to break away from the straitjacket of Illich's definition of school as the 'age-specific, teacher-related process requiring full-time attendance at an obligatory curriculum'. What inhibits such experiments is precisely the existence of the official system which pre-empt the options of the citizens who are obliged to finance it, so that alternatives are dependent on the marginal income of potential users. When the Scotland Road Free School in Liverpool asked the education authority for some very modest assistance in the form of equipment, one member of the Education Committee declared that 'we are being asked to weaken the fabric of what we ourselves are supposed to be supporting ... We might finish up with the fact that no children will want to go to our schools'.

The anarchist approach to education is grounded, not in a contempt for learning, but in a respect for the learner. Danilo Dolci told me of encountering 'bandits' in Sicily whose one contact with 'education was learning to read from an anarchist fellow-prisoner in jail. Arturo Barba recalled from his childhood in Madrid two poverty-stricken anarchist pedagogues. One, the Penny Teacher lived in a hut made of petrol cans in the Barrio de las Injurias. A horde of ragged pupils squatted round him in the open to learn the ABC at ten centimos a month. The other, the Saint with the Beard, used to hold his classes in exchange for his pupils' collection of cigarette-